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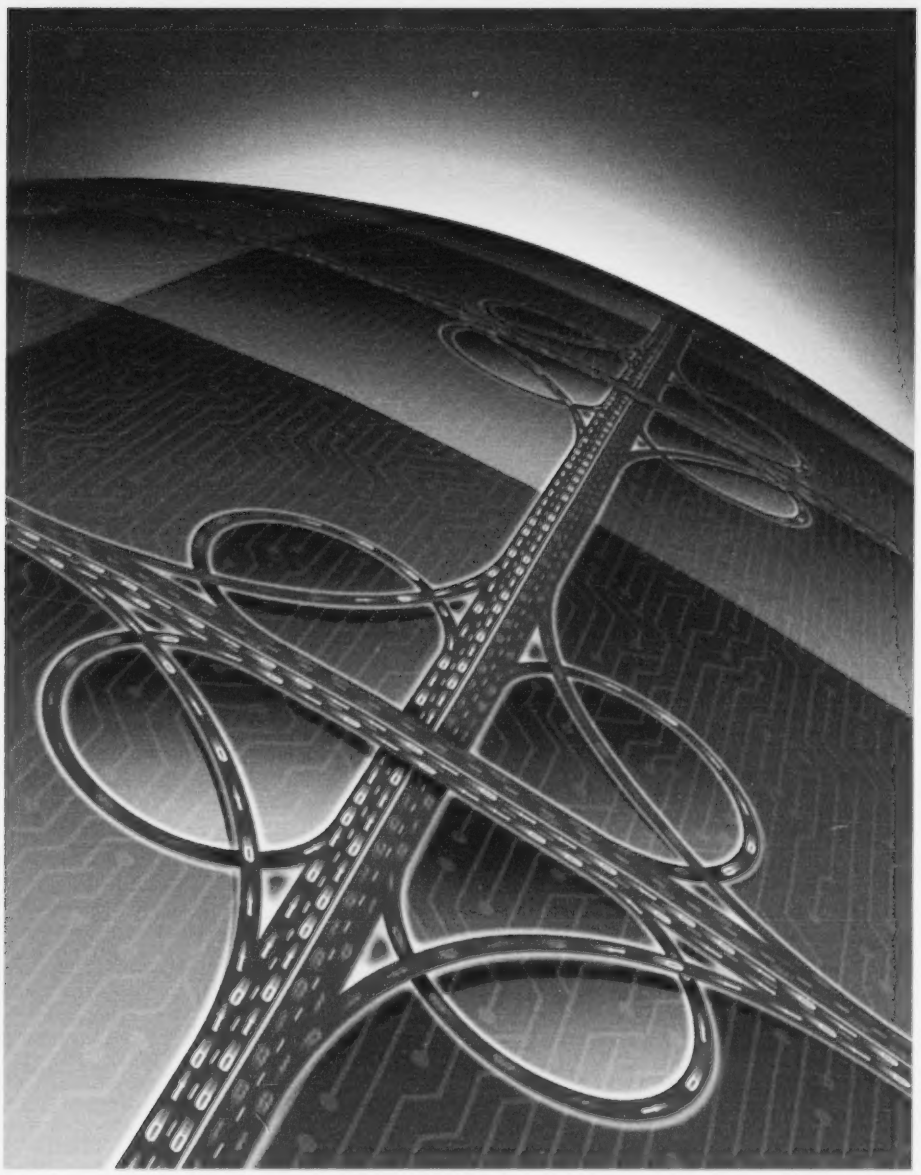
■ VOLUNTEERING ON COMPANY TIME



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p preliminary
r revised
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Highlights

In this issue

Volunteering on company time

- Just over half of all volunteers in Canada in 2000 had a paid job.
- While the overall number of volunteers diminished between 1997 and 2000, the proportion with employer support rose. In 2000, some 1.7 million employed volunteers (about half of all employed volunteers) received at least one form of support.
- Certain types of employer support for volunteering were more common than others: use of workplace facilities (57%), time off (57%), and change in work hours to accommodate volunteering (54%).
- A high proportion of unionized volunteers reported use of facilities as the most common type of employer support (63%), whereas non-unionized volunteers reported time off work (61%).

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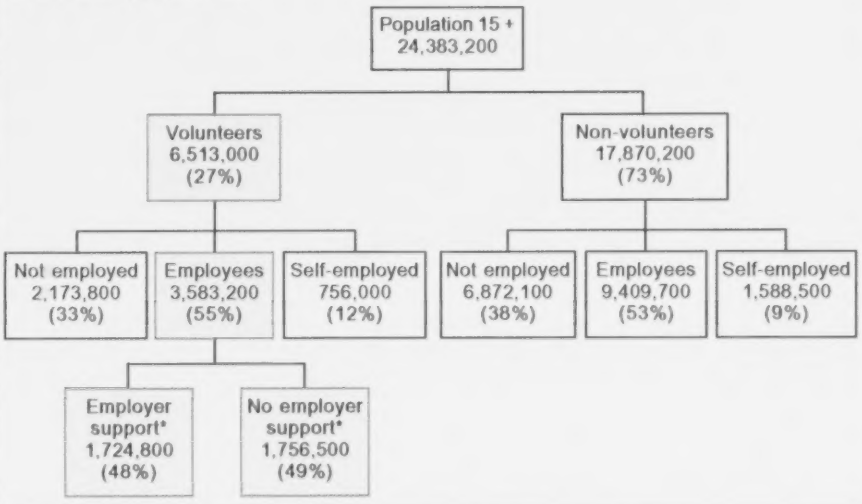
Volunteering on company time

Jacqueline Luffman

VOLUNTEERING HAS ALWAYS been an integral thread in the fabric of society, and today the demands have never been greater. While the needs of volunteer organizations keep increasing, the pool of volunteers keeps shrinking. What can be done to boost volunteering? The increasing numbers of retirees and others not in the labour force may not offer much promise—two-thirds of volunteers in 2000 had a paying job or were self-employed (see *Volunteer population*.)

Volunteer population



Source: National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000
** Figures will not add to total employees because of some non-response.*

Volunteering both supplies and reflects social capital.[1] Those who belong to formal and informal social networks are more likely to donate time to voluntary activity (Putnam 2000). Volunteering also promotes a general sense of social responsibility, builds social ties, and contributes to a healthy society. On the other hand, it can take valuable time away from other activities. For the employed, volunteering could be costly in terms of lost earnings.

Demographic changes, such as an aging workforce, and reduced spending by governments are factors demanding more support from society at large—a support that many argue volunteers can in part supply. While employed Canadians do manage to find the time to volunteer, they are increasingly busy people. A greater percentage of employees are assuming more responsibilities in both the work and family spheres (such as child care, elder care, single parenting, or working longer hours). To combat a weakening supply of volunteers and an increasing demand for volunteer services, governments have been calling for new ways to encourage, sustain and support volunteerism.[2] Increasingly, employers are being urged to encourage their employees to volunteer—even on company time—since time scarcity is believed to be a significant barrier to volunteering.

Using the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (see *Data source and definitions*), this article examines the contribution of employers in supporting volunteering: types of employer support, benefits of employer-supported volunteering, and reasons employees do not volunteer. The focus is on employees only; self-employed workers are excluded.

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What is employer support of volunteering?

Typically, employer-supported volunteer initiatives are integrated into the workplace and entail various levels of involvement and expenditure on the part of the employer (Volunteer Canada 2001). Passive support includes approval to use facilities or equipment for voluntary pursuits, as well as letters of thanks or recognition to individuals who volunteered. More active support includes approval of time off or allowing work hours to be changed to accommodate voluntary activities. Support can be once only, or ongoing.

Employer-supported volunteering on the rise

In 2000, about 3 in 10 or 6.5 million people 15 and older engaged in volunteer activities, collectively donating over one billion hours of their time. The 2000 survey showed that the bulk of these hours were being carried out by a declining number of Canadians (Hall, McKeown and Roberts 2001). This was generally true regardless of labour force status or other characteristics such as age and sex. The number of employed volunteers declined 8% between 1997 and 2000, with the greatest decline among those working part time (-17%).[3] On the other hand, hours contributed were up consistently for both those employed and not employed (Table 1).

Just over half of all volunteers were employees. Their volunteer rate was comparable with the overall volunteer rate (28% and 27% respectively), although they gave fewer hours during the year than volunteers who were not employed (140 compared with 191).

While the overall number of volunteers diminished between 1997 and 2000, the proportion with employer support rose. In 2000, some 1.7 million employed volunteers (about half of all employed volunteers) received at least one form of support. These volunteers tended to give more time (148 hours annually), the equivalent of almost three working days (20 hours) more than their non-supported counterparts. This translated into over 255 million hours of volunteer work that had at least one form of employer support (roughly a quarter of all hours contributed).

The type of support also played an important role. Volunteers with approval to change their working hours or to take time off work gave more hours, 166 and 155 hours respectively, than those who received passive support. Those receiving recognition for their volunteering gave about 142 hours, those receiving approval to use employer facilities about 148 hours (Table 2).

Many employers give time off and allow use of facilities

Because individuals rather than employers were surveyed, and because only volunteers were asked if they received any employer support, it is not known who may have had employer support available but did not volunteer, nor how many workplaces offered employer support. Thus, the following job characteristics (such as workplace size) refer only to employees who volunteered and reported employer support.

While about half of employed volunteers reported at least one form of employer support, certain types of support were more common than others: use of workplace facilities (57%), time off (57%), and change in work hours to accommodate volunteering (54%).

Table 1: Volunteers by employment status

	1997			2000			
	Number	Rate*	Annual hours	Number	Change	Rate*	Annual hours
	'000	%		'000	%	%	
Total	**7,472**	**31**	**149**	**6,513**	**-13**	**27**	**162**
Employees	**3,892**	**33**	**134**	**3,583**	**-8**	**28**	**140**
Full-time	2,912	30	133	2,772	-5	26	140
Part-time	980	43	137	811	-17	32	140
Employer support**	1,709	...	163	1,725†	1	...	148
No employer support	2,182	...	112	1,756†	-20	...	128
Not employed	**2,618**	**27**	**169**	**2,174**	**-17**	**24**	**191**

Source: National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000
* *The number in a particular category divided by the total population of that group.*
** *At least one form of support.*
† *Figures will not add to total employees because of some non-response.*
Shaded area: Statistically significant.

Table 2: Employer support for volunteers

	Facilities	Time off	Hours change	Recognition	Other
			%		
Overall	**57.1**	**56.7**	**53.6**	**43.8**	**14.1**
Firm size					
< 20 employees	54.8	61.5	59.2	40.0	14.5[E]
20 to 99 employees	59.5	56.4	50.7	44.4	15.5[E]
100 to 500 employees	58.5	51.8	50.9	49.7	15.0[E]
Over 500 employees	53.3	53.0	52.0	42.3[E]	F
Union status					
Member	62.8	48.5	47.0	46.2	11.1[E]
Not a member	54.0	61.2	57.2	42.6	15.7
Work schedule					
Full-time	60.3	58.6	52.5	44.5	14.3
Part-time	43.9	49.0	58.4	40.9	F
Job status					
Permanent	58.7	56.8	53.8	43.9	13.9
Temporary	43.0	55.9	52.4	43.1	F
Sector					
Public	65.5	51.7	44.8	50.0	9.8[E]
Private	53.1	59.1	57.8	40.9	16.1
Occupation					
Management	70.7	67.9	63.4	41.2	F
Business, finance and administrative	63.6	60.4	55.8	41.8	20.6[E]
Natural and applied sciences	54.2[E]	58.8[E]	F	F	F
Health	42.7[E]	43.1[E]	56.6[E]	39.6[E]	F
Social science, education and religion	71.3	44.1	38.7	51.2	F
Art, culture and recreation	F	F	F	F	F
Sales and service	44.5	54.3	60.3	45.7	15.4[E]
Trades, transport and equipment operators	58.5[E]	63.6[E]	49.9[E]	42.6[E]	F
Primary, processing, manufacturing and utilities	42.8	64.2[E]	51.9[E]	35.8[E]	F
Organizations volunteered	1.9	1.8	1.9	1.8	2.1
Hours volunteered	147.5	154.7	165.9	141.6	149.4

Source: National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000
Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because of multiple responses.

In the smallest workplaces (less than 20 employees), employer support most commonly took the form of time off and changing work hours. While such active types of support were also prevalent in the largest workplaces (over 500 employees), the likelihood of support was generally less. About 60% of employer-supported volunteers in small workplaces reported approval for time off, compared with 53% in the largest ones. Similarly, 59% of employer-supported volunteers in small workplaces reported approval to change work hours, compared with 52% in the largest workplaces.

A high proportion of unionized volunteers reported use of facilities as the most common type of employer support (63%), whereas non-unionized volunteers reported time off work (61%).

While management occupations encompass a wide variety of skills and jobs (ranging from retail sales managers to senior executives), the greater ability of managers in general to have authority and job control seems to provide access to certain forms of employer support. A large percentage of managers with at least one form of employer support reported approval to use facilities (71%), take time off work (68%), or change work hours (63%). On the other hand, only about 40% received recognition for their volunteer efforts.

Traditionally, certain occupations have tended to have high volunteer rates. Social service, education and religion workers had a volunteer rate of 50%, almost double the Canadian average.[4] The most common type of support for these workers was use of facilities (71%), while they were less likely than managers to report approval for time off work (44%) or changing hours (39%).

Volunteering benefits volunteers

One benefit of volunteering is the variety of skills that can be gained and then used at work. One study found that skills acquired through volunteering added to an individual's stock of human capital. On average, volunteers earned about 7% more than non-volunteers, after controlling for other factors such as occupation, education, industry, age, and labour force experience (Day and Devlin 1998).

Data source and definitions

The **National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating** (NSGVP) is the most extensive Statistics Canada survey on these topics to date. It was conducted in November and December 1997 and 2000 as a supplement to the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The survey built on 1987 work on volunteering and also introduced questions on financial giving and civic participation. The resulting data are representative of Canadians aged 15 and over.

Only those who volunteered were asked if they received employer support. Consequently, it is not known how many workers had employer support available to them but did not volunteer, nor how many workplaces offered support. The 1987 Survey of Volunteer Activity did not ask any questions about employer support.

Volunteer: An individual who willingly performed a service without pay through a group or organization during the 12-month reference period preceding the survey.

Employed volunteer: A volunteer who also worked for a private firm or business; a local, provincial or federal government; or a government service or agency during the LFS reference week. The self-employed were excluded from this study.

Non-employed volunteer: A volunteer who was not in the labour force or was unemployed.

Employer-supported volunteer: A volunteer answering yes to at least one of the following:

Did your employer give you...

1. approval for use of facilities or equipment for your volunteer activities?
2. approval to take time off or the opportunity to spend some time doing volunteer work while on the job?
3. approval to change work hours to spend time volunteering?
4. recognition or a letter of thanks for your volunteer activities?
5. other formal support for your volunteer activities (examples: donating prizes, sponsoring an event, donating financially to the organization)?

Employer-supported volunteers in 2000 were more likely than their non-supported counterparts to report that volunteering helped them acquire skills directly applicable to their current job—46% compared with 29% (Chart A). In addition, 41% of employer-supported volunteers reported that volunteering helped their chances of success in their paid job. Other benefits reported included acquiring better interpersonal, communication, managerial, technical and fundraising skills.[5]

Chart A: Employer-supported volunteers were significantly more likely to report increased skill acquisition and job benefits.

Source: National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000
Note: Employees only.
** Statistically significant difference at <.05 level.*

The skills gained through volunteering can benefit the employer as well. Employees who acquire new skills may improve their sense of self-worth and thereby offer their employer a more productive employee (Volunteer Canada 2001). Considering costs in the form of time and wages, the return on investment is important to the employer. Although benefits may not be strictly quantitative, the overall improved morale and working environment are cited as important spin-offs. In addition, companies may see volunteer support as a useful recruitment tool or a chance to equip their staff with new skills.

Employed but not volunteers

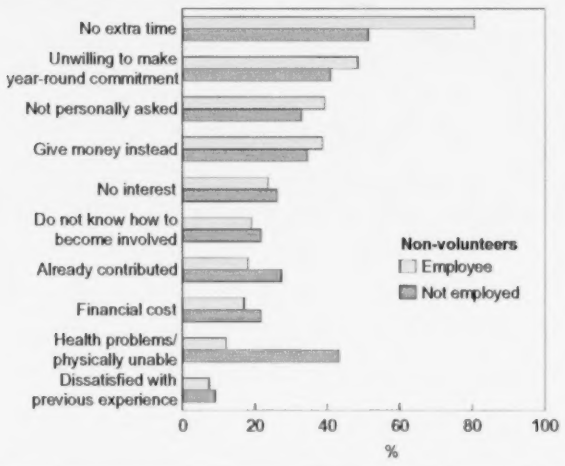
Many employees might volunteer if they had the support of their employer. Among those who did not volunteer in 2000, it is not known how many had employer support available to them. While the decision to volunteer is influenced by an interplay of socio-demographic and economic circumstances (see *Volunteer rates*), employers could help on a number of fronts. For example, lack of time is usually considered the biggest barrier, and was the reason given by 81% of

employed non-volunteers, compared with 51% of those not employed (Chart B). Half of employed non-volunteers were also unwilling to make a year-round commitment—also time-related.

A similar national survey conducted in the United Kingdom in 1997 found that among workers who were not offered employer support, 40% said they would have been interested in volunteering if support had been available. Those who did not participate in an employer-supported initiative were asked what would have made them more likely to become involved. The key factors were time off work, knowing that the activity would benefit their career, learning new skills, volunteering as part of a group, and more information about available opportunities (IVR 1997).

Employers could also assist by helping individuals who wish to volunteer but do not know where or how. About 20% of employed Canadians did not know how to become involved, and 39% did not volunteer because no one asked them (up from 35% in 1997). Being asked to volunteer is the single most important factor in determining volunteer activity (Freeman 1996). A U.S. survey found that the volunteer rate among those asked to volunteer was four times greater than among those not asked (Independent Sector

Chart B: Lack of time is a barrier to volunteering for many workers.



Source: National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000

Volunteer rates

Generally speaking, volunteering varies according to life circumstances. Among the employed in 2000, the volunteer rate tended to peak in the middle years (45 to 54) whereas among the non-employed, volunteering was highest among youth (15 to 24). The non-employed youth volunteer rate rose 1.8 points from 1997 to 2000, likely the result of recent education initiatives in many provinces.[6] Employed volunteers were more likely than those not employed to be married and have children at home. Also, employed women were more likely to volunteer (30%) than employed men (25%), while non-employed men and women were equally likely (24%).[7] For more information, refer to the highlights from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (Hall, McKeown and Roberts 2001).

	Total	Employee	Not employed
		%	
All ages	**26.7**	**27.6**	**24.0**
15 to 24	29.0	24.6	34.8
25 to 34	23.6	23.2	20.7
35 to 44	29.8	29.9	26.0
45 to 54	30.1	32.7	21.7
55 to 64	27.8	25.8	28.2
65 and over	18.4	F	18.1
Newfoundland and Labrador	31.5	35.0	27.7
Prince Edward Island	36.5	37.5	34.6
Nova Scotia	33.8	35.5	30.4
New Brunswick	28.7	29.2	25.8
Quebec	19.1	18.7	19.3
Ontario	25.5	26.2	22.2
Manitoba	36.3	38.6	32.8
Saskatchewan	42.3	45.4	38.5
Alberta	39.2	39.1	37.1
British Columbia	26.0	28.6	22.0
Men	25.2	25.4	24.0
Women	28.1	30.1	24.1
Less than high school	18.6	19.0	18.1
High school graduate	22.6	21.8	22.4
Some post-secondary	33.2	33.8	30.0
Post-secondary diploma	28.2	27.0	29.4
University degree	38.6	38.5	37.8
Married	28.2	30.0	23.8
Single	25.6	22.7	29.7
Other	21.3	26.8	17.4
With children under 18	32.1	32.9	26.0
No children under 18	24.4	24.5	23.7
Household income			
< $20,000	16.7	16.8	15.8
$20,000 - $39,999	21.1	20.2	21.4
$40,000 - $59,999	26.3	24.3	29.0
$60,000 - $99,999	32.4	32.9	29.7
$100,000 +	38.8	36.0	44.2

Source: National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000.
Note: Rates are calculated as the number in a particular category divided by the total population of that group.

1999.) Social pressure may also play a role. And if a boss asks an employee to volunteer, it is more likely that the employer will support volunteer efforts, particularly in community activities that the employer already sponsors. Personal motivation is also strongly linked to volunteering. Only about a quarter of employed workers indicated they had no interest at all in volunteering, 12% had poor health, and only 7% indicated they were dissatisfied with their previous volunteering experience.

Summary

Undoubtedly, time pressures have accelerated over the last decade. For many, hours in paid work have increased. So too have non-work demands, as the proportion of working Canadians caring for children or seniors continues to rise. While over half of workers feel rushed every day (according to the 1998 General Social Survey), employed Canadians are still actively involved in volunteering, even more so than those with theoretically more time on their hands. When accompanied by employer support, employed volunteers are likely to devote more hours to their efforts—about 255 million hours or 24% of total volunteer hours in 2000.

The type of employer support varies by job characteristics. For example, the smallest workplaces seem more amenable to changing employee work hours or allowing time off (as reported by employer-supported volunteers). While unionized employer-supported volunteers tended to report more passive forms of support, recent initiatives may encourage more volunteering. Members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (a federal government union) are now entitled to one day of paid volunteer leave per year.

The benefits of employer support to the worker, and ultimately the employer, are evident. Ancillary job benefits were reported more by employer-supported volunteers than by their non–employer-supported counterparts. In addition, employers may be influenced to support worker volunteer efforts to promote a positive public image and to retain staff.

It seems plausible that employers who support employee volunteer efforts are likely to attract individuals who are already motivated to volunteer. Since time is cited as the biggest barrier to volunteering, employers who allow flexible work arrangements may be lessening the tension between work and outside interests, thereby allowing motivated people more time to pursue voluntary activities.

Perspectives

Notes

1 Social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. They are the relationships that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions.

2 An example is the Canada Volunteerism Initiative, an accord between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector to promote volunteerism. For more information, see *The Canada Volunteerism Initiative: The Report of the National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table,* December 2001. Available at www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/cvireport.

3 It is difficult to determine if there has been a declining trend in volunteering. Differences between 1997 and 2000 represent only a short period of time. In 1987, the overall volunteer rate was 26.8%, lower than in 1997 (31.4%) but about the same level as in 2000 (26.7%). Recent analysis shows that 1997 was a particularly good year for volunteer participation and in fact, the number of people exiting voluntary activity after 1997 was high. The overall result appears to indicate a continuing decline in volunteer participation (as measured by various rates and hours contributed). The year 1997 might have been more of an adaptation to social and economic conditions rather than a deep-seated change in volunteer behaviour (Reed and Selbee 2000).

4 Self-employed workers are not included in this occupational category.

5 Self-employed volunteers (individuals who have no employer to support them) exhibited similar ranking of benefits; however, they were less likely to report that their skills helped their chances of success, or that the skills were directly applicable to their job, or that they learned fundraising skills.

6 In certain provinces, volunteering is mandatory for high school graduation.

7 All these reported differences are statistically significant.

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